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Structural Supports for Upward Mobility

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## STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS FOR UPWARD MOBILITY \*

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*This paper re-examines the social mechanisms that lead lower-class youth to make use of college as a mobility channel. It focuses on a select group of lower-class youth who, by their enrollment in a high-status university, already give unmistakable evidence of being engaged in the process of upward mobility. The findings reveal that upward mobility is linked to a distinctive pattern of maternal authority within the nuclear family and to dependence upon the outside social structure for support.*

RESEARCH of the past decade has brought us much closer to understanding the factors that lead a substantial, if small, proportion of lower-status youth to avail themselves of the opportunity for a higher education.<sup>1</sup> The answer in part lies in the internal variables of intelligence and motivation.<sup>2</sup> It is also evident that social mobility does not occur in a social vacuum. Generally, lower-class youth find themselves confronted by an environment in which going to college is the exception, not the rule, and in which strong counterpressures may be mounted against those who seek to deviate from prevailing cultural norms. Consequently, if college goals are to emerge among lower-class youth, some substitute channels must exist

for transmitting information about college—information that is traditionally handed down to children in the more favored classes. In addition, the negative pressures of the environment require that some intermediate social support be available to sustain the mobile individual when the occasion arises for him to sever ties with age mates of his acquaintance who do not possess educational aspirations to match his own.

The part the nuclear family plays in the mobility process still remains far from clear. Early investigators largely discounted the family's significance, premising instead that clique associates in high school or school teachers are chiefly responsible for stimulating and patterning the mobility aspirations of adolescents.<sup>3</sup>

Recently the family's contribution to educational mobility has become a focus of attention. Kahl, the chief exponent of this position, pointedly rejects the possibility that an "encouraging and sympathetic" teacher might have been instrumental in setting "common man boys" on the path to college. In addition, he relegates to the peer group the passive role of reinforcing college ambitions, not of initiating them. He finds that the attitudes of the parents—and particularly of the father—represent the pre-eminent factor differentiating intellectually capable lower-class boys who aspire to go to college from those who do not. The father, disappointed with his own life accomplish-

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent summary of the extensive literature bearing on this problem is found in Chapter IX, "Intelligence and Motivation," of Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1960, pp. 227-259.

<sup>2</sup> Burton R. Clark, *Educating the Expert Society*, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1962, pp. 44 and 84; Robert J. Havighurst and Bernice L. Neugarten, *Society and Education*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1957, pp. 221-260; Byron S. Hollinshead, *Who Should Go to College*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, pp. 31-39; Dael Wolfe, *American Resources of Specialized Talent*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1954, pp. 158-163.

<sup>3</sup> August B. Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1949, pp. 446-447; Robert J. Havighurst and Robert R. Rodgers, "The Role of Motivation in Attendance at Post-High School Educational Institutions," Appendix to *Who Should Go to College*, by Byron S. Hollinshead, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-165.

ment, "teaches his son that the next step up demands more education." Furthermore, it is in such families that parents apply the continual pressure necessary to insure the boy's doing well in school.<sup>4</sup>

Despite widespread acceptance of Kahl's general thesis, an extensive body of findings suggests that his emphasis on the father's role in the mobility process may be misplaced.<sup>5</sup> This evidence indicates that a distinctive feature of upward mobility is that the mother's educational or occupational attainments outrank those of the father. The reversal of parental authority implied by these data does not necessarily rule out the factor of paternal dissatisfaction; but it does cast its significance in a new light, suggesting a symptom more than a cause of the structural conditions precipitating upward mobility. The father may be dissatisfied with his attainments; but this later evidence suggests that the dissatisfaction stems from the presence of a wife who is all too willing to remind him of his failure to measure up to her standards of attainment.

One difficulty in reconciling these divergent viewpoints is that the evidence is largely confined to high school students hopeful of going on to college. The intention of going to college is by no means a guarantee of attendance, particularly in the lower strata where as many as 50 per cent of the students who expect to continue their education beyond high school fail to do so.<sup>6</sup>

Another limitation of these studies is the failure to differentiate among the college

goals held by students. Despite the diversity of higher education in our society, going to college has been equated automatically with social mobility. Yet, many students from lower social backgrounds go to junior college or community college where they frequently receive vocational training that is only an extension of the training obtained in high school. Furthermore, they live at home cloistered from the influence of a middle-class undergraduate environment. It is doubtful that such an educational encounter provides a real social transition either in terms of status experiences or in terms of status opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

The present paper focuses on lower-status youth entering the West Coast coeducational equivalent of an Ivy League university. Like other students in the university, those from the lower strata have been screened for personal characteristics (defined according to middle-class values) as well as for ability and motivation to do college-level work. Thus, the combined factors of self and institutional selection enable us to locate individuals unequivocally enmeshed in the process of using higher education as an avenue for mobility.

#### RESEARCH PROCEDURES

*Sampling.* The data are taken from a four-year panel research designed to give information on the social and behavioral consequences of upward mobility.<sup>8</sup> The initial panel consisted of 194 matriculants at Stanford University. Two samples were used for their selection:

1. A probability sample was taken of one

<sup>4</sup> Joseph A. Kahl, "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of 'Common Man' Boys," *Harvard Educational Review*, 23 (Summer, 1953), pp. 186-203; Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure*, New York: Rinehart, 1957, pp. 281-289. Also see David J. Bordua, "Educational Aspirations and Parental Stress on College," *Social Forces*, 38 (March, 1960), pp. 262-269.

<sup>5</sup> Lipset and Bendix, *op. cit.*, pp. 238, 249-250; Fred L. Strodbeck, "Family Interaction, Values, and Achievement," in D. C. McClelland (ed.), *Talent and Society*, Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1958, pp. 181-184, 189-191; W. Lloyd Warner and James C. Abegglen, *Big Business Leaders in America*, New York: Atheneum, pp. 77-78.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. White, *These Will Go to College*, Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1952, p. 45; Phillip Cutright, "Students' Decision to Attend College," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 33 (February, 1960), pp. 292-299.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., Burton R. Clark, *The Open Door College: A Case Study*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960, pp. 51-61; Havighurst and Neugarten, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-257; David Riesman and Christopher Jencks, "The Viability of the American College," in Nevitt Sanford (ed.), *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of the Higher Learning*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962, pp. 74-192.

<sup>8</sup> For a fairly concise statement of the research goals and procedures, see Robert A. Ellis, "Stanford Study of Social Differences in the Academic Success of College Undergraduates," in Charles E. Bidwell (ed.), *The American College and Student Personality: Report of a Conference on College Influences on Personality*, Andover, Mass.: Social Science Research Council Committee on Personality Development in Youth, 1960, pp. 15-16.

out of every six first-year freshmen entering this institution in the fall of 1958 (N=160). This sample, which we shall refer to as the Regular Sample, is used to describe the general characteristics of Stanford undergraduates.<sup>9</sup>

2. To compensate for the underrepresentation of lower-status students in the Stanford setting, an oversample was taken of all remaining lower and lower-middle class freshmen not originally included in the Regular Sample. The oversample (N=34) is added to the Regular Sample whenever the factor of social class is analyzed.

All 194 subjects included in these two samples actually participated in the study. They were initially interviewed a month after matriculation and, so long as they remained at college, again at the end of their freshman, sophomore, and senior years.

*Research variables.* Social class was measured by an Index of Class Position developed and validated for the present research.<sup>10</sup> It is derived from two component scales: (1) the rating assigned to the student's father on Hollingshead's 7-point scale of occupational prestige<sup>11</sup> and (2) the class rating the student gives his family in response to Centers' class identification question (modified to permit a tripartite division of the middle class<sup>12</sup>). These ratings are combined to

yield a six-point scale of class position, as follows:

Social Class	Nominal Designation
I	Upper
II	Upper-Middle
III	Middle-Middle
IV	Lower-Middle
V	Upper-Lower
VI	Lower-Lower

Information on mobility influences was collected at the start of the freshman year. Students were instructed to specify on a check list the persons who had been "important in helping . . . [them] decide to come to college." The list contained the following categories of individuals: (1) father, (2) mother, (3) siblings, (4) other relatives, (5) school friends, (6) persons connected with the church, (7) school teachers, (8) adult club leaders, and (9) any other persons not already mentioned. After responding affirmatively or negatively to each of these categories, the students were asked to designate which specific individual had been the most important influence.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY

Like other Stanford undergraduates, the lower-class student's decision to go to college is made with the approval and support of his family. As Table 1 shows, 96 per cent of class V and VI freshman view at least one, and usually both, of their parents as having influenced them to continue their schooling beyond high school.<sup>14</sup> Moreover,

1949; Ellis, Lane, and Olesen, *op. cit.*; Joseph A. Kahl and James A. Davis, "A Comparison of Indexes of Socio-Economic Status," *American Sociological Review*, 20 (June, 1955), pp. 317-325.

<sup>13</sup> These data are obviously no better than the respondents' ability and willingness to recall pertinent information. Accuracy of recall was abetted by the date of the interviews, which was sufficiently soon after matriculation for the events leading up to college to be fresh in the students' minds. The students' willingness to impart this information cannot be so easily assessed, though the reliability and validity of data gained in other segments of the interviews indicate that the majority had cooperated fully in the research.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the occasionally small number of cases involved, results have been presented for each sex, permitting inspection of the order as well as the magnitude of percentage differences.

The small number of cases at the lower extreme of the class scale necessitated collapsing class cate-

<sup>9</sup> The representativeness of the Regular Sample was checked against known parameters of the population from which it was drawn, with uniformly positive results. Comparison of the Regular Sample with an identically drawn sample of male freshmen entering Stanford the previous year showed a high degree of stability in students' social characteristics, as well as in the various attitudes and values to which they adhered. The comparison, however, did sustain the evidence of gradual rise in intellectual capacity found in most selective institutions around the country.

<sup>10</sup> See Robert A. Ellis, W. Clayton Lane, and Virginia Olesen, "The Index of Class Position: An Improved Intercommunity Measure of Stratification," *American Sociological Review*, 28 (April, 1963), pp. 271-277.

<sup>11</sup> August B. Hollingshead and Frederick C. Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness: A Community Study*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958, pp. 390-391.

<sup>12</sup> Following Kahl and Davis, we instructed those respondents who placed their family in the middle class to indicate whether their family was in the upper-middle, middle-middle, or lower-middle class. See Richard Centers, *The Psychology of Social Classes*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,

TABLE 1. SOCIAL CLASS AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN FAMILIAL INFLUENCES REPORTED AS "IMPORTANT" FOR COMING TO COLLEGE  
(Reported in Percentages)

Family Members Cited as Important	(N)	Males					Females				
		Social Class					Regular Sample (99)	Social Class			
		I (12)	II (49)	III (27)	IV (16)	V & VI (22)		I (11)	II (33)	III (14)	IV & V (10)
Either parent	100	94	85	81	95	91	91	91	93	100	92
Father	100	90	85	81	73	88	91	88	86	100	89
Mother	92	90	81	81	95	87	73	88	93	100	87
Other relatives <sup>a</sup>	75	43	37	69	64	48	64	70	57	70	64

Males + Females						
Family Members Cited as Important	(N)	Classes V & VI (27)	Regular Sample (160)	Statistic	Coefficient	P
Either parent		96	91	Exact prob.	—	.66
Father		78	88	Exact prob.	—	.26
Mother		96	87	Exact prob.	—	.28
Other relatives <sup>a</sup>		70	54	$\chi^2$	1.80	.18

<sup>a</sup> Siblings are included in this category.



they are no less likely than other freshmen to report being influenced by other members of the family. About half the students mention an older sibling who had been to college; others mention a more distant relative—an aunt, an uncle, or a cousin. When we consider that 59 per cent of these upwardly mobile students specifically single out one parent as the person most important in influencing their college decision (Table 2), it seems abundantly clear that these lower-status families are actively involved in the mobility plans of their offspring.

What pattern of parental influence prevails among these mobile individuals? Is it, as Kahl's research indicates, the father who exerts the dominant pressure for mobility? Our evidence suggests the reverse. For males, the frequency with which the father is considered an important influence tends to decline with class (Table 1), especially in the lower strata. Even more conclusive evidence of the father's subordinate role is presented in Table 2.<sup>15</sup> Only 19 per cent of class V and VI students report their father as the major person influencing them to go to college, in contrast to 51 per cent of the Regular Sample. In the lower strata, the mother is more apt to be mentioned, though the effect of maternal dominance is somewhat obscured by the competing tendency of lower-class subjects to name neither parent as the primary influence. But for those cases where a parent is considered most important, the results (given

gories for analysis. For males, the two lower-class groups could be combined; but for females, five girls from the lower class (class V) had to be combined with five girls from the lower-middle class (class IV).

All statistical analyses of differences between the lower class (i.e., classes V and VI) and the Regular Sample were done for males and females combined. Because the Regular Sample contains four individuals also included in classes V and VI, statistical independence is violated, but the error introduced is negligible and indeed conservative with respect to rejection of the null hypothesis.

Yates' correction for continuity has been used in all chi-square tests. Where expected cell values are less than five, Fisher's exact test of probability is used as an alternative to chi-square.

<sup>15</sup> There is no need to control for the effect of broken homes in this study because broken homes are no more prevalent among lower-class students than among others at Stanford. In both cases 15 per cent of the students came from homes that were broken by death, separation, or divorce.

in the lower section of Table 2) firmly establish a sharp reversal of parental dominance in the lower classes. For Stanford undergraduates generally, the main source of parental support for going to college is the father. In classes V and VI, the mother is singled out as the dominant influence by 75 per cent of the students.<sup>16</sup>

The tendency to identify with mothers rather than fathers in seeking college direction suggests that distinctive authority patterns may characterize the lower-status homes from which the upwardly mobile come. This inference is supported by the fact that the mother's education is markedly superior to the father's in 37 per cent of the class V and VI families as compared to 9 per cent of the families from the Regular Sample ( $\chi^2_{\text{lat}} = 12.96$ ;  $P < .001$ ). Moreover, among the ten cases where the balance of education clearly favors the mother, not one student designated the father as the major person influencing his college plans.<sup>17</sup> Seven of the ten perceived the mother as the dominant influence, while the remaining three named a high school teacher.

In the lower class, these parental influences are regarded as only part of a more general pattern of mobility expectations. This is brought out by data on the parents' post-college expectations for male students (see Table 3). Male students from classes V and VI report long-range parental ambitions in which a college education is but the first step toward an anticipated upper-middle class career. These students see their parents as expecting them to embark upon a professional career that will bring them respect and deference in the community and, at least so far as mothers are concerned, to be outstanding in their chosen occupations. Not unexpectedly, lower-class parents differ from other Stanford parents in their emphasis on the son's enter-

<sup>16</sup> The percentages in the B section of Table 2 sometimes total more than 100. For those respondents who regarded both parents as equally important in their decision to come to college, both father and mother were credited as the major influence on the student's decision.

<sup>17</sup> Mother's education is defined as markedly superior to the father's when: (1) she has had college training, while the father has had no more than a high school education; or (2) she has graduated from high school, while the father has not gone beyond ninth grade.

TABLE 2. SOCIAL CLASS AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN FAMILIAL INFLUENCES REPORTED AS "MOST IMPORTANT" FOR COMING TO COLLEGE  
(Reported in Percentages)

	Males						Females				
	Social Class						Regular Sample (99)	Social Class			
	I (12)	II (49)	III (27)	IV (16)	V & VI (22)	I (11)		II (33)	III (14)	IV & V (10)	
(N)											Regular Sample (61)
A. Family Members Cited as "Most Important"											
Either parent	83	86	74	75	59	81	73	82	79	60	79
Father	50	51	59	50	23	53	45	47	64	10	49
Mother	33	35	26	38	41	32	36	55	43	50	48
Other relatives <sup>a</sup>	08	02	00	00	05	03	09	03	07	00	05
B. Single Parent Cited as "Most Important" Where Parents Are Mentioned <sup>b</sup>											
(N)	(10)	(42)	(20)	(12)	(13)	(80)	(08)	(27)	(11)	(06)	(48)
Father	60	60	80	67	38	65	63	56	82	17	62
Mother	40	40	35	50	69	40	50	67	56	83	60
Males + Females											
	Classes V & VI (N)	(27)	Regular Sample (160)	Statistic		Coefficient		P			
A. Family Members Cited as "Most Important"											
Either Parent	59	80	$\chi^2$ $\chi^2$ $\chi^2$ Exact prob.	4.50 8.68 0.40 —	.03 .003 .53 .99						
Father	19	51									
Mother	44	38									
Other relatives <sup>a</sup>	04	04									
B. Single Parent Cited as "Most Important" Where Parents Are Mentioned <sup>c</sup>											
(N)	(16)	(128)	$\chi^2$ $\chi^2$	5.10 3.23	.02 .07						
Father	31	64									
Mother	75	48									

<sup>a</sup> Siblings are included in this category.

<sup>b</sup> For males, the number of cases when parents are cited as "most important" is: I=10, II=42, III=20, IV=12, V & VI=13, Regular Sample = 80. For females, the number of cases when parents are cited as "most important" is I=8, II=27, III=11, IV & V=6, Regular Sample=48.

<sup>c</sup> For males + females, the number of cases when parents are cited as "most important" is: V & VI=16, Regular Sample=128.

TABLE 3. SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES AMONG MALES IN PARENTS' POST-COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS  
(Reported in Percentages)

Parents Reported Clearly Expecting Student to:	(N)	Social Class					Regular Sample (99)	Statistic <sup>a</sup>	Coefficient	P
		I (12)	II (49)	III (27)	IV (16)	V & VI (22)				
Graduate from college										
Father	100		96	89	100	95	94	Exact prob.	—	.99
Mother	100		96	93	100	91	95	Exact prob.	—	.76
Go to graduate school										
Father	58		47	41	50	45	46	$\chi^2$	0.06	.81
Mother	58		53	44	62	50	51	$\chi^2$	0.04	.84
Become a professional man										
Father	75		56	48	56	86	55	$\chi^2$	5.86	.02
Mother	67		68	56	68	86	63	$\chi^2$	3.57	.06
Have a job better than his father's										
Father	17		28	48	88	77	37	$\chi^2$	10.04	.002
Mother	25		30	59	75	91	41	$\chi^2$	15.72	.00008
Be outstanding in his occupation										
Father	83		53	44	38	36	51	$\chi^2$	0.93	.34
Mother	83		71	67	62	64	71	$\chi^2$	0.16	.69
Be respected and looked up to in the community										
Father	92		88	89	94	86	89	Exact prob.	—	.98
Mother	92		93	93	94	95	93	Exact prob.	—	.99

<sup>a</sup> Statistical tests are computed between Classes V & VI and Regular Sample.



ing a profession and in their greater tendency to expect the son to have a better job than his father.

INFLUENCES OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

Students from all social levels credit persons outside the family with a significant role in their decision to come to college. The extent of this support is shown in Table 4, where the median number of nonfamilial influence is tallied by sex and class.<sup>18</sup> Though girls are somewhat more likely than boys to mention the importance of nonfamilial influences, for both sexes it is the students from lower social backgrounds who report the greatest number of nonfamilial influences. Clearly, upwardly-mobile individuals range more freely beyond their families for reinforcement of their plans to attend college than do their socially privileged counterparts.<sup>19</sup> However, to be a girl as well as a member of the lower class constitutes a double handicap so far as one's college chances are concerned: <sup>20</sup> it is not surprising to find that the number of nonfamilial influences reported reaches its maximum among lower-status girls.

*High school teachers.*<sup>21</sup> Of the nonfamilial

<sup>18</sup> Table 4 presents the median number of *types* of nonfamilial influences, rather than the median number of persons actually mentioned. This was done partly because of the difficulty of counting the number of persons designated—as, for example, when mention is made of “the friends I went to high school with”—and partly to insure independence among the units tabulated.

<sup>19</sup> The possibility that a response set of “productivity” contaminated these results is ruled out by collateral data on students’ reasons for coming to college. Here, in contrast to the findings on nonfamilial influences, the number of highly important reasons cited consistently declines with class position. See Lee J. Cronbach, “Response Sets and Test Validity,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 6 (Winter, 1946), pp. 475–494; E. R. Smith, Ralph W. Tyler, *et al.*, “Appraising and Recording Student Progress,” *Adventure in Education* (Vol. III), New York: Harper & Bros., 1942, pp. 80–111, 180–190.

<sup>20</sup> David F. Aberle and Kaspar D. Naegele, “Middle Class Fathers’ Occupational Role and Attitudes Toward Children,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 22 (April, 1952), pp. 366–378; Havighurst and Neugarten, *op. cit.*, p. 243; Samuel A. Stouffer, *Social Research to Test Ideas*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962, pp. 228–230.

<sup>21</sup> When the teacher mentioned was also a relative, priority was always given to kinship in classifying the student’s answer.

TABLE 4. SOCIAL CLASS AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN MEDIAN NUMBER OF TYPES OF NONFAMILIAL INFLUENCES REPORTED FOR COMING TO COLLEGE

Males						Females						
	I (12)	II (49)	III (27)	IV (16)	V & VI (22)	Regular Sample (99)	I (11)	II (33)	III (14)	IV (10)	Regular Sample (61)	
(N)	0.67	0.95	1.42	2.00	1.70	1.10	1.60	1.54	1.17	2.70	1.47	
Males + Females												
	Classes V & VI (27)					Regular Sample (160)	Statistic					P
(N)	1.91					1.26	z					<.02
	Mann-Whitney U					2.30 <sup>a</sup>						

\* The z has been corrected for tied ranks.

TABLE 5. SOCIAL CLASS AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN PERSONS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY CITED AS INFLUENCING STUDENTS TO COME TO COLLEGE  
(Reported in Percentages)

	Males						Females				
	Social Class						Social Class				
	I (12)	II (49)	III (27)	IV (16)	V & VI (22)	Regular Sample (99)	I (11)	II (33)	III (14)	IV & V (10)	Regular Sample (61)
A. Persons Cited as "Important"											
School friends	33	31	52	38	32	36	36	45	29	60	39
Teacher	25	53	59	81	82	54	82	73	57	100	72
Other adults	08	24	22	56	41	25	36	24	21	60	26
B. Persons Cited as "Most Important"											
Teacher	00	02	11	06	32	04	09	00	07	40	05
Males + Females											
	(N)	Classes V & VI (27)				Regular Sample (160)	Statistic	Coefficient		P	
A. Persons Cited as "Important"											
School Friends		44				38	$\chi^2$	0.22		.64	
Teacher		85				61	$\chi^2$	5.04		.03	
Other Adults		48				26	$\chi^2$	5.75		.02	
B. Persons Cited as "Most Important"							Exact Prob.	—		.00004	
Teacher		33				04					

TABLE 6. SOCIAL CLASS AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN INFLUENCES REPORTED IMPORTANT FOR THE CHOICE OF UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR  
(Reported in Percentages)

Influence Cited	(N)	Males					Females					Regular Sample (56)	
		Social Class				Regular Sample (86)	Social Class						
		I (11)	II (40)	III (26)	IV (14)		V & VI (19)	I (11)	II (31)	III (12)	IV & V (09)		
1. Familial													
Either Parent		55	42	38	21	32	41	73	39	42	33	46	
Father		55	42	38	21	21	41	45	19	25	22	25	
Mother		00	20	15	21	21	16	64	32	33	22	39	
Other Relatives <sup>a</sup>		36	22	19	14	21	23	18	19	17	11	20	
2. Nonfamilial													
High school friends		18	10	19	21	21	16	09	10	25	33	14	
High school teachers		27	20	42	50	68	33	27	39	83	67	48	
Other adults <sup>b</sup>		09	10	08	21	00	09	09	03	00	11	04	
College friends		27	30	19	36	21	27	00	10	42	22	16	
College teachers or faculty adviser		27	40	23	50	32	34	45	26	50	22	36	
3. Work or Travel Experience		45	35	27	21	16	33	36	42	08	11	32	

<sup>a</sup> Siblings are included in this category.  
<sup>b</sup> This category does not include persons connected with the college.

TABLE 6—Continued

Influence Cited	(N)	Classes V & VI (24)	Males + Females		Statistic	Coefficient	P
			Regular Sample (142)				
1. Familial							
Either parent		33	43		$\chi^2$	0.44	.51
Father		21	35		$\chi^2$	1.18	.27
Mother		21	25		$\chi^2$	0.05	.82
Other relatives *		21	22		$\chi^2$	0.02	.89 <sup>e</sup>
2. Nonfamilial							
High school friends		21	15		Exact Prob.	—	.71
High school teacher		67	39		$\chi^2$	5.45	.02
Other adults <sup>b</sup>		04	07		Exact Prob.	—	.99
College friends		21	23		$\chi^2$	0.01	.94 <sup>e</sup>
College teachers or faculty adviser		29	35		$\chi^2$	0.08	.78
3. Work or Travel Experience		17	32		$\chi^2$	1.56	.21

<sup>a</sup> Siblings are included in this category.

<sup>b</sup> This category does not include persons connected with the college.

<sup>c</sup> The fact that a higher P value is computed for "other relatives" than for "college friends," even though the magnitude of percentage differences observed goes in the opposite direction, should not be interpreted as computational error. It is a vagary in the computation of chi square introduced by using Yates' correction for continuity on data from fourfold tables where the differences between observed and expected cell frequencies are less than .5. If Yates' correction for continuity is not used with these data, then  $\chi^2$  for "other relatives" = .012 and for "college friends" = .034. The P values of .91 and .85 obtained for the latter coefficients are now in the descending order anticipated.

influences, the high school teacher turns out to be the most significant, especially in the lower strata (see Table 5). Some 85 per cent of Class V and VI students mention a high school teacher as having played an important part in helping them decide upon college, and 33 per cent nominate a high school teacher as the person chiefly influencing that decision. Hence, an important structural support for social mobility is provided within the formal framework of the public secondary school, even to the extent that the influence of a school teacher may supersede that of the parent.

Undoubtedly, the considerable talents of these youngsters help bring them to the attention of their teachers.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, mobile individuals apparently must gain adult encouragement and guidance if their aspirations are to be implemented effectively. If our interpretation is correct, the teacher's significance in the mobility process largely stems from the lower-class parents' inability to give effective direction to the aspirations they have stimulated in their children.

Support for the latter conclusion is furnished by data collected at later stages of the research on social influences governing the students' choice of an undergraduate major.<sup>23</sup> Results for all sectors of influence are

<sup>22</sup> Unlike lower-class adolescents in the general population, those at Stanford excelled in all criteria used to measure academic potential. For example, their College Board test scores were, on the average, some twenty points higher than those obtained for the Regular Sample. The median three-year high school grade point average for lower-class boys was 3.89; for the girls, 3.92.

<sup>23</sup> The panel design enabled us to gain information on these factors at the end of the academic year in which students first declared their major. Fifty-one per cent of the students declared their major by the end of the freshman year; 42 per cent, by the end of the sophomore year. (Six per cent did not declare a major until the beginning of the junior year. Since no junior-year interviews were scheduled, this group was not interviewed about choice of a major until May of the senior year in college.)

Sixty-seven per cent of those interviewed during the freshman or sophomore year, had, as seniors, retained their original majors; while 12 per cent had shifted only their emphasis (e.g., changing from sociology to political science or mechanical to electrical engineering). Thus, the first major formally declared represents a decision of lasting impact on the college careers of the majority of students.

given in Table 6, but our discussion will focus primarily on the parents and the high school teacher. Compared to other undergraduates at Stanford, students from the lower classes are far more likely to depend upon their high school teacher for guidance in making this decision. Sixty-eight per cent of the students from classes V and VI, but only 39 per cent of those in the Regular Sample, mention the high school teacher. This is apt testimony to the role these teachers have played in shaping the college plans of the upwardly mobile students. Even more germane to our thesis is the fact that in the lower classes teachers are twice as likely as parents to have an important role in influencing the students' choice of major, while in the general population, parents reportedly exercise as much influence as the teachers.

*Other adults.* That the upwardly mobile need auxiliary adult support is further confirmed by the data in Table 5 on references made to "other adults" as important influences on their coming to college. This category encompasses ministers, family friends, previous employers, family physicians, etc. Students in classes V and VI are almost twice as likely as those in the Regular Sample to mention these individuals; but as Table 6 indicates, outside adults do not play as significant a role as high school teachers in guiding the decisions made by upwardly mobile students once they are in college—at least so far as these are represented by their choice of an undergraduate major.

*Peers.* Peer influences are more evenly distributed by class. Nevertheless, Tables 5 and 6 show that a substantial proportion of lower-class freshmen mention high school friends as an important factor in their own decision to go to college and in their subsequent choice of a college major.

Even though high school peers do not directly exercise the influence that, for example, high school teachers do, they may nevertheless have a latent function in the mobility process: either, as Kahl has emphasized, by providing reinforcement for the mobility goals held by the lower-class youth<sup>24</sup> or by providing informal training in the varied motives, attitudes, and social skills

<sup>24</sup> Kahl, "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of 'Common Man' Boys," *op. cit.*

needed to make the shift to a middle-class reference group a behavioral reality.<sup>25</sup> Data on class V and VI students in the Stanford sample indicate that close peer-group ties with the middle class were formed in high school. Two-thirds of them took a prominent role in high school extracurricular activities, where they undoubtedly had frequent opportunities to be drawn into close association with students of higher social status.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, they belonged to high school cliques in which the majority of their close friends were college-bound—one third of these to major four-year institutions.<sup>27</sup>

*Travel and work experiences.* The findings also underscore the special advantage upper- and upper-middle class students have in planning their college careers (Table 6). To a much greater degree than persons from the middle or lower classes, they have had travel

and work experiences which later guide their choice of a major. Thirty-nine per cent of class I and II students specifically refer to the important bearing such experiences had on their choice of a major, while only 20 per cent of the students from classes III and IV and 17 per cent of those from classes V and VI do so. ( $\chi^2=7.41$ ;  $P<.01$  when class I and II undergraduates are compared with all other Stanford undergraduates.)

Thus, students from lower status circumstances encounter a second handicap in their quest for social mobility. Lower-class parents are not only less able to give direct guidance to students' career plans, but they are also less able to create for them the intermediate learning opportunities by which students from more favored backgrounds are prepared for their future roles.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Our findings emphasize the collateral role that both parents and adults outside the family play in the mobility process. They show that:

1. The impetus for mobility has its roots in the nuclear family; but, contrary to Kahl's thesis, it is the mother more often than the father whose reaction to the family's status in life is the catalyst for mobility.<sup>28</sup>

2. While the family may provide the initial leverage to propel the lower-class youth toward college, mobile youth must also gain outside social support and direction for their college plans.<sup>29</sup>

3. The chief source of outside support is the school teacher, often overlooked as a fac-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Merton's treatment of the function of anticipatory socialization in the mobility process. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (rev. ed.), Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957, pp. 260-271.

<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with Beilin's evidence that a high level of extracurricular participation in high school typifies college-bound boys from the lower class but not those who do not plan to go to college. See Harry Beilin, "The Pattern of Postponability and Its Relation to Social Class Mobility," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 44 (August, 1956), p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> We followed Pilisuk's example in constructing our list of "major four-year institutions." An institution was listed as a major one if it was included either in the *Chicago Tribune's* 1957 survey of the 40 best schools in the nation or in the Knapp and Greenbaum list of 50 colleges and universities in the country that have been most productive of future Ph.D.'s. To the 72 major institutions initially obtained by this procedure we have added: (1) the three national service academies, (2) St. Olaf and Julliard—on the basis of their high standing in the Knapp and Greenbaum scale of productivity in humanities, and (3) the University of Illinois—which came in for very prominent mention in the *Chicago Tribune* report and just missed being included in their final roster of the top ten universities in the country. See Robert H. Knapp and Joseph J. Greenbaum, *The Younger American Scholar: His Collegiate Origins*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953; Chesly Manly, "Greatest Schools in Nation: A Survey by the *Chicago Tribune*," *Chicago Tribune* April 21-June 9, 1957; Phyllis Pilisuk, *The Effectiveness of the Honors Programs in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts*, Honors Council, University of Michigan, November, 1960, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Other evidence indicates that a "strong mother-weak father" family structure is especially conducive to upward mobility. See Bendix and Lipset, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250, 255-256. (This same familial authority pattern is inordinately prevalent among individuals suffering from severe mental illness. See Melvin L. Kohn and John A. Clausen, "Parental Authority Behavior and Schizophrenia," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 26 [April, 1956], pp. 297-313.)

<sup>29</sup> Simpson reaches similar conclusions on the need for auxiliary supports in upward mobility in his recent study of the differential effect of parental and peer-group influences on "mobile" and "non-mobile" working-class boys in high school. Richard L. Simpson, "Parental Influence, Anticipatory Socialization, and Social Mobility," *American Sociological Review*, 27 (August, 1962), pp. 517-522.



tor in mobility.<sup>30</sup> While in a general sense it may be true that the public school system does not radically alter the status hierarchy, teachers may nevertheless be instrumental in helping some of the more talented youth in the lower class realize their mobility potential. Comments made by students during the interviews indicate that the public school system did bring these intellectually able youngsters from the lower class into close and friendly contact with individual teachers with whom they could discuss their plans for the future and gain the incentives and encouragement needed to sustain their motivation for higher education. Here, the teacher reinforces the mobility strivings instilled by the parents and conveys information about the educational system that is not ordinarily available in the lower-class home.

4. The teacher, however, is not the only middle-class role model for upwardly mobile youngsters. These youth also turn to other adults in the community for the additional outside support needed to overcome the handicaps of their class background.

5. High school peers have a less direct role in the mobility process. Rather than influencing the lower-class youth in their college goals, they provide a middle-class learning environment where the mobile individ-

ual is exposed to the norms and behavioral traits successful mobility requires.

6. The continuing reliance of these lower-class youth on extrafamilial support gives some confirmation for Merton's hypothesis of the *disassociative* consequences of social mobility.<sup>31</sup> The need to turn to outside adults for help and guidance implies a gradual weakening of dependence upon the family.<sup>32</sup> Since, as Merton points out, "membership in a group which has involved deep-seated attachments and sentiments cannot be easily abandoned without psychological residue,"<sup>33</sup> the result is very likely to be a strong ambivalence toward the parents that the student may find difficult to face at a conscious level. Thus these findings offer clues to further study of the incipient stresses and strains that may accompany social mobility.

<sup>31</sup> Robert K. Merton, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-275, 293-294, 302-304, and 329-330.

<sup>32</sup> A recent nation-wide sample of high school boys provides evidence that college aspirants from the lower social strata are, when compared to those from the same background who do not plan to go to college: (1) significantly less likely to nominate a family member as an "adult ideal," (2) somewhat more predisposed to affirm that "friendship can be as intimate as a family tie," and (3) more apt to report disagreements with their parents. While the authors interpret their data in psychological terms as the development of autonomy interests among the socially mobile, the results also fit the sociological hypothesis of familial disassociation. See Elizabeth Douvan and Carol Kaye, "Motivation Factors in College Entrance," in Nevitt Sanford (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 209-212.

For additional evidence on the disassociative consequences of upward mobility, see Gene Norman Levine and Leila A. Sussman, "Social Class and Sociability in Fraternity Pledging," *The American Journal of Sociology*, (January, 1960), pp. 391-399; Warner and Abegglen, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-64, 70-83.

<sup>33</sup> Merton, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>30</sup> Brookover and Warner and Abegglen stand out as exceptions among sociologists in their willingness to give credence to the teacher's part in fostering upward mobility among children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. See Wilbur B. Brookover, *A Sociology of Education*, New York: American Book Co., 1955, pp. 107-115; Warner and Abegglen, *op. cit.*, p. 79. For a more typically negative view of the teacher's role, see Neal Gross, "A Critique of 'Social Class Structure in American Education'," *Harvard Educational Review*, 23 (Fall, 1953), pp. 316-318.